Defense Lays Letelier Slaying to CIA

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Defense lawyers for three Cuban exiles on trial in connection with the 1976 assassination here of former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier accused the Central Intelligence Agency yesterday of masterminding the killing. But a prosecutor contended that the Chilean secret police had ordered the slaying.

"This is not a pipe dream," defense lawyer Paul Goldberger told a U.S. District Court jury of seven women and five men in his opening statement. "As hard as it is to believe, the CIA was responsible for a murder in the nation's capital."

Goldberger asserted that the defense will prove that the government's key witness, Michael Vernon Townley, an American-born Chilean secret police agent who has confessed to planting a bomb that blew up Letelier's car, was a double agent working for the CIA as well as the Chilean secret police, once known as DINA.

Earlier, Assistant U.S. Attorney Eugene M. Propper, who has investigated the slaying since the day it occurred, accused DINA of directing the assassination. He said the slaying was the ultimate retribution for the strident criticism Letelier was leveling at the time against the military dictatorship of Gen. Augusto Pinochet.

Goldberger offered the jury a contrasting view.

"This was a monstrous crime committed by monstrous people," Goldberger said, "but we will prove that neither DINA, nor the Cuban Nationalist Movement nor the Chilean government had any responsibility for it." The three staunchly anti-Castro Cuban exiles on trial—Guillermo Novo Sampol; his brother, Ignacio

See LETELIER, A8, Col. 1

LETELIER, From A1

Novo Sampol, and Alvin Ross Diaz—are all leaders of the Cuban group.

In claiming CIA involvement in the Sept. 21, 1976, Embassy Row assassination of Letelier, Goldberger cited previously disclosed CIA contacts with Townley in the early 1970s and the fact that an arm of the agency once sought approval to use Townley "in an operational capacity." But Goldberger cited no new evidence of CIA connections with Townley.

Propper said the government will prove that the Cuban Nationalist Movement, a militant anti-Castro group based in New Jersey, had a continuing relationship with Chilean government officials and DINA since early 1975.

In one example of that relationship, Propper said, Guillermo Novo supplied explosives and detonating devices to Townley, who had been ordered by DINA to go to Mexico to kill Chilean exiles opposing the Pinochet regime. In exchange, Townley had promised that any leftover supplies would be given to the Cuban group. But the exiles' meetings on Chile had ended by the time Townley got to Mexico, Propper said.

In the end, the prosecutor charged, the Cuban exiles only agreed to help Townley kill Letelier as long as Townley participated in the assassination. The Cubans required his participation as a DINA agent, Propper said, because the Cuban group's leaders were still angry at the Chilean government's earlier expulsion to the United States of a Cuban exile, Rolando Otero. Otero was later convicted of a bombing at Miami International Airport.

As the prosecution and defense lawyers ended their opening remarks, the jury heard the first testimony in the case, a gripping account of the bombing by the lone survivor of the explosion, Michael Moffitt, an assistant to Letelier at the Institute for Policy Studies, a left-wing Washington think tank.

Moffitt and his wife, Ronni K. Moffitt, were riding to work with Letelier when the bomb, set off by a radio-control device, ripped through the floorboard of Letelier's Chevelle as he rounded Sheridan Circle near the Chi-

lean Embassy. Letelier's legs were blown off and Ronni Moffitt was suffocated by her own blood as a result of injuries she received in the blast.
tr for ad 5

"Ronni and Orlando were talking about some book they had read when they were young," the husky 27-year-old Moffitt recalled. "As we got to Sheridan Circle, I was thinking about what a slow driver (Letelier) was."

Seconds later, Moffitt said, "I heard a hissing sound, a flash of light up toward the front of the car. The car just seemed to erupt in a deafening explosion. The noise was really deafening.

"I started to smell the most unbelievable stench. I don't know whether it was human flesh or what," said Moffitt, who recounted the details in a firm, clear voice.

Eventually, Moffitt said he extracted himself from the wreckage and at one point tried to help Letelier out of the car.

"There was huge hole in the car," Moffitt said. "Orlando was turned to the back of the car. His eyes were half open, half closed. I slapped him a couple times and said, 'Orlando, Orlando! It's Michael. Can you hear me?

"I managed to get my wrists under his arms," Moffitt said, and then realized that the bottom half of Letelier's body had been blown off.
tr for add 6

Moffitt then spotted his wife along the street curb and a woman passerby who was trying to help her. "The blood was just pouring out of her mouth," Moffitt said of his wife, whom he had married 3½ months before.

"It seemed like an eternity," he said of the ordeal, "but I guess it was only 40 minutes." Moffitt said a doctor at a hospital told him his wife was dead.

Ronal Karpen Moffitt's parents, Murray and Hilda Karpen, and two brothers of hers, Michael and Harry, watched the proceedings in Judge Barrington D. Parker's courtroom yesterday. As Moffitt left the courtroom, Mrs. Karpen kissed him lightly on the cheek.

Defense lawyers will cross-examine Moffitt this morning. The defendants sat solemnly through Moffitt's testimony and showed no emotion. Two of the Cubans, Guillermo Novo and Ross, are charged with the murders of Letelier and Moffitt, while Ignacio Novo is accused of lying to a grand jury investigating the slaying and failing to tell federal officials about the crime.

Earlier yesterday, Parker denied a defense motion to suppress evidence taken by FBI agents from Ross' former office in Union City, N.J. The defense claimed that the seizure, done without a search warrant, was illegal.

But Parker sided with the government's contention that Ross had abandoned the office by not paying rent for the four months prior to the March 6, 1978, seizure of the property. The government contends that the materials taken from the office were part of the left-over items used to make the bomb.